

William Robert Garner



Letters from
California
1846-1847



*EDITED, WITH A SKETCH OF THE
LIFE AND TIMES OF THEIR AUTHOR,
BY DONALD MUNRO CRAIG*

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Excerpt

Nothing of moment has occurred here since my last. The calm and liberal measures of Commodore Shubrick have tranquilized the public mind, and contributed much to a quiet possession of the country. By this I intend no reflection on his predecessors. Commodore Stockton had to contend with elements which are now at rest. The thunder-clouds which then darkened the heavens, are now only seen here and there in fading masses on the horizon. The war is over; hardly an echo of it lingers faintly among the hills.

Commodore Shubrick leaves here in the Independence on Monday or Tuesday next for the coast of Mexico, where he has ordered the whole squadron. He goes down to capture Mazatlan, Guaymas, San Blas, Acapulco and Tehuantepec. These are important commercial points, and their possession will not be without its effect on the public mind of Mexico, though I doubt if any extent of conquest will secure a speedy and permanent peace. There will probably be some fighting at Mazatlan, and still more at Acapulco, which is defended by batteries of great strength. . . . But Commodore Shubrick is determined on the attack, and on the capture too; you will know the result before long.

The advance party of the emigrant column for the season, is already in California. We have ceased counting their wagons,—and as for the emigrants, you might as well attempt to number the trees which wave over them. These emigrants would have settled the fate of California without any declaration of war with Mexico. They might perhaps have had a little fighting here between themselves and the natives, but their triumph was sure, not only in their courage and skill, but in their over-powering numbers.

Some of your politicians talk of giving up California. Why, you can no more give her up, than you can the soil on which you

1. Colton Hall is still one of Monterey's treasured buildings. Begun about March 1, 1847, and finished on March 8, 1849, it was intended for several purposes: the lower floor for a school, the upper for an assembly hall and city hall. A jail with an enclosed patio and whipping post adjoined it. Originally there were no broad twin stairways leading to the second-floor balcony. The two massive wooden columns of the balcony are, by family tradition, said to be the work

tread. You may say she shall go back to Mexico, but she won't go there; she will be a Territory, and then a State, of the American Confederacy, and nothing else. We don't care a fig how you figure it out on your political map; we have figured it out for ourselves, and our work will stand, whatever may become of yours.

Monterey has still Mr. Colton, of the Navy as Alcalde. He tried hard to get off when his year was up, but the people remonstrated, and addressed communications to Commodore Shubrick and Gov. Mason, and so he consented to remain for the present. The citizens have offered to send for his family, but he has decided to return home in the Congress when she goes. His popularity lies in his energy, impartial administration of justice, and the extensive improvements he is effecting in the city. Among these is a large stone edifice, designed for public schools. It is a superb building; the citizens call it Colton Hall.¹

October 10, 1847—This season of the year in California is delightful, particularly in Monterey, the heat not being so intense here as it is to the southward of this, neither is the breeze so strong as to make the weather unpleasant.

Commerce is increasing with the population, but we want competition. Although the cent per cent duties are done away with, and the new tariff is not yet in force here, still there are many articles brought here for which an exorbitant price is demanded. Of course, there being no articles of clothing manufactured here, as the population increases the demand will of necessity be greater. If a weaving company could be got up here, who would raise their own wool and get such machinery from the United States as would be requisite, a very short time would serve for a number of enterprising persons in that line of busi-

of William Garner (interview with Harry Downie). In contrast to the other old structures of Monterey, Colton Hall is not of adobe but of "chalk rock" (see biographic sketch, note 2 above). The roof was of redwood shingles.

Within six months of its completion, Colton Hall was being readied for the first California Constitutional Convention, which met in its upper chamber from Sept. 1 to Oct. 13, 1849.